

ARCTIC EXPLORATIONS

a folk opera in one act



by
Michael Dellaira

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Commissioned by New Amsterdam Singers and Nancy Manocherian's the cell theatre

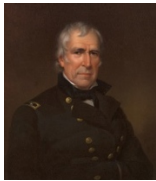
(Arctic Explorations is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature)

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

CHORUS – sometimes commenting collectively on the action, sometimes amplifying the thoughts, words, and actions of one of the characters, but always a member of the orchestra.



Siarnaq – Inuk shaman who befriended Kane and his crew when they were trapped in the Arctic, teaching them how survive a long, dark, Arctic winter. Without Siarnaq's generosity and humanity Kane and his men would have suffered the same fate as Sir John Franklin.



President Zachary Taylor : 12th president of the United States. A former army colonel and Mexican War hero, Taylor served as president from March 1849 to July 1850. It was he who asked Congress to commission Elisha Kent Kane to lead an expedition to the Arctic in search of Sir John Franklin and the fabled Northwest Passage.



Lady Jane Franklin: wife (and widow, though she doesn't know that) of Sir John Franklin, who, with 134 men, set out from London in 1845 in search of the Northwest Passage and should have returned home by now. After numerous rescue missions the British navy has given up. Undaunted, Lady Jane turns to United States President Zachary Taylor for help.



Margaret (Maggie) Fox: Starting in 1849, and for the next twenty years, she and her sister Kate conducted séances (which they called “spirit circles”) across the U.S. and Europe, with many of the rich and famous as her clients. Maggie was engaged to, and then presumably married, the Arctic explorer Elisha Kent Kane. Kane’s prominent Philadelphia family disapproved of Maggie, a farm girl from upstate New York; they considered her a huckster and con-artist.



Elisha Kent Kane: a navy surgeon and explorer, he was commissioned by Congress to lead the 1853 expedition in search of Sir John Franklin and the Northwest Passage. Trapped in the Arctic ice for two years, on his return he was treated by the press and public as a national hero. He quickly published a book about the trials and travails of his crew, *Arctic Explorations*, which was a huge bestseller. (By 1900 it was said that every household owned at least two books, the other being the Bible.) Dr. Kane tried to keep his romance with Maggie Fox a secret, knowing it would damage his reputation.

Prologue

Sullualuk (The Northwest Passage)

PROJECTION:



CHORUS

Qaagit (Come here)
Qaagit, Ujartigut (... come find us)
Qaagit, Ujarniartigut (.. come and find us)
Maaniippugut (we are here)
We are the spirit of the Northwest Passage.
That mythical route from the West to the East.
Come find us, if you can, come face the challenge;
Come sail north to the cold coast of Greenland
Then head west, straight for Alaska.
In our ocean of ice that is ready to trap you,
Crush you and starve you and bring you disaster.
But glory awaits you if you can find us:
Lumber and furs from New York to China
Silks and spices from Canton to London
Glory awaits you if you can find us.
We are the spirit of the Northwest passage.

SIARNAQ

(spoken)
*Sullualuk. Ujartigut. The Northwest passage.
Connecting the Atlantic to the Pacific by way of the
Arctic. It's where I live. Think of it: only six weeks to sail
from New York to Guangzhou. Whoever controlled this
passage controlled the world.
For three hundred years, explorers came here looking for
it; filled with dreams of power and glory, they didn't*

CHORUS

Qaagit, Ujartigut.
Many have tried and all of them failed
Many have died but still they set sail
They came and sailed north to the cold
coast of Greenland,
Then headed west, straight for Alaska.
In our ocean of ice we were ready to trap
them,

know how brutal this land could be, how deadly. Most never returned home.

Sir John Franklin of the British Royal Navy was one such explorer. He left London in May of eighteen-forty-five with a crew of one hundred-and-thirty-four men and was never heard from again.

Those who did make it back did so because they turned to us, the Inuit, for help.

This is the land where I lived, where the Inuit people have lived for hundreds of years. It is changing. Today ships sail through the Northwest passage every day. Some of them even carry tourists.

But the spirit of the Northwest Passage is not silent. Listen.

Crush them and starve them. We brought them disaster.

Qaagit.

Qaagit, Ujartigut.

Qaagit, Ujarniartigut.

Maaniippugut.

Qaagit, Ujartigut.

Qaagit.

1.

Maggie Fox and the spirit circle

Lights come up on MAGGIE FOX. Projected behind is her New York Times obituary.

PROJECTION:

NEW YORK TIMES, March 10, 1893
DEATH OF MARGARET FOX KANE.

YOUNGEST OF THE ONCE CELEBRATED
FOX SISTERS, MEDIUMS.

Margaret Fox Kane, the youngest of the once celebrated Fox sisters, through whose agency the "Rochester rappings" were developed, died early Wednesday morning at the house of Mrs. Emily B. Ruggles, 492 State Street, Brooklyn. Funeral services will be conducted to-night in Bradbury Hall, 292 Fulton Street, Brooklyn, at 8 o'clock, by Titus Merritt of this city, one of Mrs. Kane's oldest friends. Mrs. Mary A. Gridley of Brooklyn, the Rev. Dr. Charles Hicks of this city, and other prominent Spiritualists will make addresses.

Margaret Fox was one of three daughters of John D. Fox, a sporting man of some consequence in his day, and the sisters, Anne, Katharine, and Margaret, lived with their parents on a small farm near Hydesville, N. Y., in a house which was said to be haunted. The sisters professed to have certain peculiar powers which they alleged made it possible for disembodied spirits to communicate with them and other human beings. While in this house Margaret Fox received a message—so she said—by means of rappings from the uneasy soul of a Jewish peddler who had been murdered some years before. The sisters became notorious by the seances they gave in Rochester, and then they came to New York, and afterward went abroad. Their unexplained manifestations created great excitement, and many noted men went to the seances and took keen interest in things Spiritualistic for a time. William Cullen Bryant, the novelist Cooper, George Bancroft, and Horace Greeley were among Margaret Fox's clients.

It is still related by spiritualists that Fenimore Cooper said on his deathbed: "Tell the Fox girls they have prepared me for this very hour."

In 1856 Margaret Fox married Dr. Elisha Kent Kane, the arctic explorer, by the Quaker rite, although the Kane family never acknowledged her as his wife. After Dr. Kane's death Mrs. Kane published a book called "The Love Life of Dr. Kane," in which she adduced evidence of her marriage. In recent years public interest in Mrs. Kane's powers has declined, and she has lived in poverty and obscurity. She died, wholly destitute of means, in the home of her faithful friend, Mrs. Ruggles. Her last public appearance was on last Christmas Day, in the Carnegie Music Hall. The other Fox sisters are dead, and only one brother, David, now lives. His home is near Rochester, and he is utterly incredulous about Spiritualism.

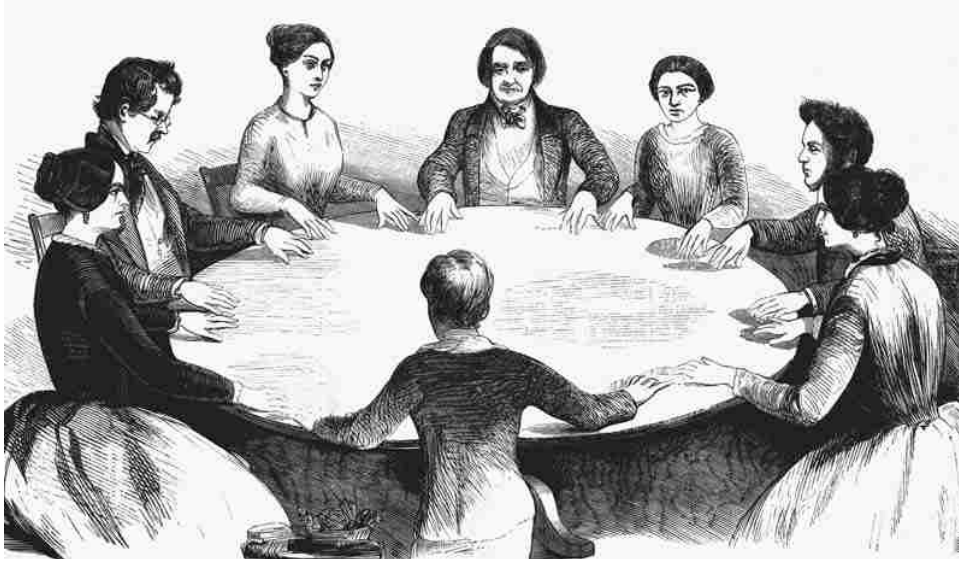
MAGGIE

Margaret Fox Kane (that's me, though I was mostly known as Maggie), the youngest of the once celebrated Fox sisters, died early Wednesday morning.

Funeral services will be conducted tonight in Bradbury Hall, 292 Fulton Street, Brooklyn, at 8 o'clock. The Rev. Charles Hicks and other prominent Spiritualists will make addresses.

My sister Kate and I claimed that spirits could communicate with us by tapping out messages on a table.

PROJECTION:



MAGGIE (*holding hands with a chorus member on either side of her*)
(spoken)
Is someone there?

Orchestra and CHORUS answer.

MAGGIE (*interpreting answer*)
Yes, we are here.

(spoken)
What is your mission to the world?

(Orchestra and CHORUS answer)

MAGGIE (*interpreting answer*)
To do good.

(spoken)
Of what benefit will it be to mankind?

(Orchestra and CHORUS answer.)

MAGGIE (*interpreting answer*)
We can reveal truths to the world – and men will become more harmonious.

(spoken)

Some people imagine that the spirits are evil and deceive us. What shall we say to them?

(Orchestra and CHORUS answer.)

MAGGIE *(interpreting answer)*

Tell them to dispense with their bigotry. Tell them we are good. Good spirits. Ask them why they refuse to investigate. Tell them they are not as wise as they think they are.

(spoken)

Can your sounds be heard by all persons?

(Orchestra and CHORUS answer)

MAGGIE *(interpreting answer)*

No. The time will come when they can.

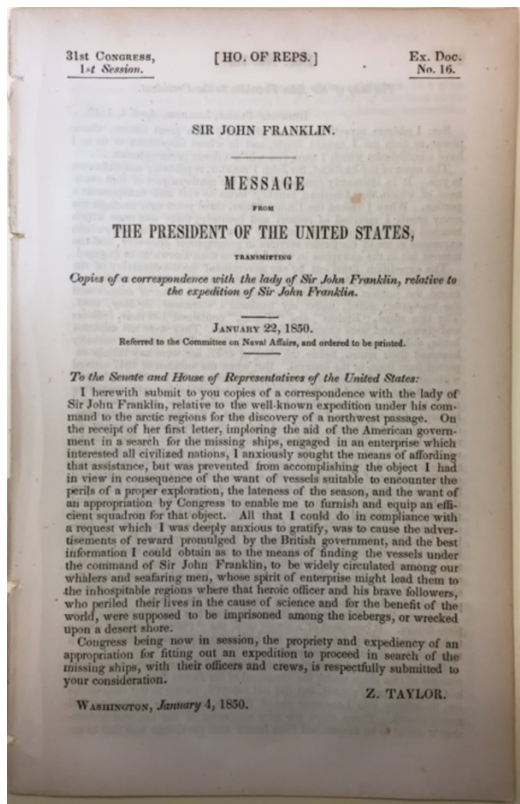
MAGGIE

We became world famous.

Many noted people came to our "spirit circles." Czar Alexander, Sojourner Truth. The author James Fenimore Cooper said on his deathbed: "Tell the Fox girls they have prepared me for this very hour."

I had a long, much-talked-about romance with the Arctic explorer, Dr. Elisha Kent Kane. We were married in a private Quaker ceremony. His family never acknowledged me.

2. Lady Jane



CHORUS

Message from the President of the United States.
January 22, 1850.
To the Senate and House of Representatives.

PRESIDENT ZACHARY TAYLOR

I submit here copies of a correspondence
With the wife of Sir John Franklin,
The Commander of the well-known expedition
To the Arctic regions
To discover the Northwest Passage.

LADY JANE (at her writing desk)

Sir, I address myself to you, as the head of a great nation,
Whose power to help me I cannot doubt,
And in whose disposition to do so, I have a confidence
Which I trust you will not deem presumptuous.
The name of my husband, Sir John Franklin,
Is probably not unknown to you.

(standing)

LADY JANE

He and his crew were not expected home
Unless success had early rewarded their efforts,
Or some casualty hastened their return.
But when the autumn of 1847 arrived,
Without any news of the Ships,
The attention of Her Majesty
Was directed to the necessity
Of searching for them,
In case of their being imprisoned in ice,
Or wrecked and in want of provisions.

CHORUS

Without any news of the ships.

PRESIDENT TAYLOR

I want to help her.
I think our country should help her.

LADY JANE

It must be remembered that the ships
Carried supplies for only three years,

CHORUS

Or wrecked and in want of provisions.

LADY JANE

But nearly four years have now elapsed,
So that the survivors of so many winters in the ice
Must be at the last extremity.

CHORUS

Without any news of the ships.

LADY JANE

And so now I address you
On behalf of hundreds, if not thousands, of others.
I have thrown myself on your generosity
And pay homage to your own high character,
And to that of the people over whom
You have the distinction to preside.

I have the honor to be Sir,
With great respect,
your obedient Servant

CHORUS

on behalf of hundreds, if not thousands, of others
I have thrown myself on your generosity.

LADY JANE

Jane Franklin.

PRESIDENT TAYLOR

We will go – we will find Sir John Franklin
And save the poor man from a lingering fate
The mind sickens to dwell on.
And while we're at it
We will go and discover the Northwest passage,
Discover that mythical route to China.
Sail due north to the cold coast of Greenland
Then head west, straight for Alaska
In an ocean of ice, that is ready to trap us,
Crush us and starve us and bring us disaster.
Glory awaits us if we can do it. Glory.

CHORUS

Thank you America, the whole world will shout
You saved Sir John Franklin, there's not any doubt.
America's rich and is noble,
Its power soon will be global,
Thank you America, the whole world will shout

PRESIDENT TAYLOR

That's what this expedition's about.

3. The Expedition

Projection:



KANE

In the month of December, 1852,
I had the honor of receiving special orders from the Navy,
To “conduct an expedition to the Arctic seas in search of Sir John Franklin.”

Because of the harsh conditions under which we’d be living,
We did not sail under the rules that normally govern our ships;
We had our own regulations.

First, absolute subordination to the officer in command.
Second, abstinence from all intoxicating liquors -
Except when dispensed by special order.
Third, the habitual disuse of profane language.
We had no other laws.

MEN

We left New York on the 30th of May, 1853.

KANE

Our store of provisions was chosen with little regard for luxury.

Two thousand pounds of well-made pemmican.
A parcel of Borden’s meat biscuit.

KANE

Some packages of powdered potato.
Some pickled cabbage.

And a liberal quantity
Of American dried fruits and vegetables.

MEN

We reached Baffin’s Bay without incident

A few days more found us off the
coast of Greenland.

KANE

Besides these, the ordinary etceteras of an Arctic cruiser.

KANE

A wardrobe of woolens,
A full supply of knives, needles
And other articles for barter.
A large, well-chosen library,

And a valuable set of instruments for scientific
observation.

MEN

We passed Kingitoq.
And finally Inalik
The farthest point of civilization.

Beyond which the coast may be regarded
as unknown.

4. Love Letters: Interlude 1

ELISHA

My dearest Maggie,
Just as you have your wearisome round of daily money-making,
I have my own sad vanities to pursue.

MAGGIE

Elisha, dear Elisha, it is late

MAGGIE

my beloved, late
And I have carefully stolen from my bed,
That I might write to you undisturbed
Even by the breathings of others.

ELISHA

We are sold to different destinies.
I am as devoted to my calling as you,
Poor child, can be to yours.

It is after midnight and the sweet moon is
the only witness to my devotion.

In a few weeks I will be away from you.
Thick ribbed ice, sterner than warrior's steel
Will separate me from you.

ELISHA

Some day or other –
Polar ice permitting –
You and I will thaw out in Italy.
Italy! Land of sunshine and flowers,
And music and lovers!

MAGGIE

Doctor, there is a rumor
that you and I are to be married before you go to the Arctic.

ELISHA

Remember then, as a sort of dream,
That Doctor Kane of the Arctic Seas
Loved Maggie Fox of the Spirit Rappings.

5. In the Ice

PROJECTION:



CHORUS

Bay ice, drift-ice, field-ice, floe,
Ice-belt, ice-face, ice-foot,
Ice-hook, ice-raft, ice-table, nip, pack,
Land ice, old-ice, young-ice

KANE

(spoken)

December 15th, 1853

KANE

We have lost the vestige of our mid-day twilight.

CHORUS

Bay-ice, drift ice, etc.

KANE

We cannot see print, and hardly paper.
Our fingers cannot be counted a foot from our eyes.

The mean temperature of the last five days has been:

CHORUS (alto solo)

December 10th: forty six point three degrees

CHORUS (all)

Below zero.

CHORUS (tenor solo)

December 11th: forty five point sixty degrees

CHORUS (all)

Below zero.

CHORUS (soprano solo)

December 12th : forty six point sixty four degrees

CHORUS (all)

Below zero.

CHORUS (bass solo)

December 13th : forty six point fifty six degrees

CHORUS (all)

Below zero. Zero.

KANE

Noonday and midnight are alike,
And except for a vague glimmer in the sky
That seems to define the hill outlines to the south,
We have nothing to tell us
That this Arctic world of ours even has a sun.

KANE

At such temperatures
The dry snow resembles sand,

CHORUS

Below zero, below zero ...

And any resort to snow
for purposes of allaying thirst
was followed by bloody lips and tongue.
It burnt like caustic.

PROJECTION



KANE

(spoken)

*This is the first chance I've had to draw pictures.
The observer is clad in a pair of seal-skin pants,
A dog-skin cap, a reindeer jumper, and walrus boots.
He sits upon a box.
A stove, glowing with at least a bucketful of anthracite,
Represents a heating apparatus,
And raises the thermometer as near as may be
To ten degrees below zero.*

6. Love Letters: Interlude 2

ELISHA

My dearest Maggie
In the midst of ice and desolation
I still think of you.

MAGGIE

Dear, oh dear Elisha,
I fear I am thinking too much of you.
For four days I have done nothing but weep.

ELISHA

Can you turn a thought to me?
Your portrait is a great comfort.
I often gaze on its quiet loveliness.

MAGGIE

How has our separation affected you?
Without you all is darkness,
And every place seems a grave.

ELISHA

Do not be afraid of thinking too much of me.

MAGGIE

You ask if I mix in company?
No! I join no merry scenes.
Elisha, I have not laughed since we parted.

7. Siarnaq

(Men are assembled for daily prayer. Hymn music plays, "In Christ there is no East or West", when suddenly)

MAN IN CHORUS *(interrupting)*

People hollering ashore!

PROJECTION



SIARNAQ

Aya,

Tusalerpara. (I hear)

Samangga tusalerpaa (I hear from the west)

CHORUS

I think I have heard

The sound of wood from the sea.

She thinks she has heard

The sound of wood from the sea.

KANE

I went up and there they were,

On all sides of our rocky harbor

As we gathered on the deck they rose

Upon the more elevated fragments of the land-ice,

Standing singly

Like the figures in the tableaux of the opera.

I proceeded, and waved my hands,

Toward a figure who made herself conspicuous.

CHORUS

I think I have heard

The sound of wood from the sea.

She thinks she has heard

The sound of wood from the sea.

SIARNAQ

Qissiaq samani. (wood from the sea.)

Aya yai yo.
Tusalerpara (I hear)
Samangga tusaavara (I hear from the west)
Qissiat samani. (wood from the sea.)
Aya yai yo.

WOMEN

What are they? Should we be afraid?
Are they spirits?

SIARNAQ

Every single thing has a spirit.
The stone, the willow, and polar bear.
Sometimes if it's close I can feel it
Invisibly breathing the air.

WOMEN

The body will change from birth until death
Every pebble, every branch, every bone.

SIARNAQ

But when the body takes its last breath
The spirit goes on breathing alone.

SIARNAQ Aya yai yo	WOMEN Once the body is dead the spirit is freed To take revenge on all who are living.
------------------------------	---

SIARNAQ

That's why I respect each thing that I eat
So its spirit will have peace and forgive me.

SIARNAQ & WOMEN

Our world is of ice, danger, starvation
Your god would not put a man here.

SIARNAQ

So when white men ask what I believe in
I say "I don't believe, I just fear."

SIARNAQ

(touching Kane)

(spoken)

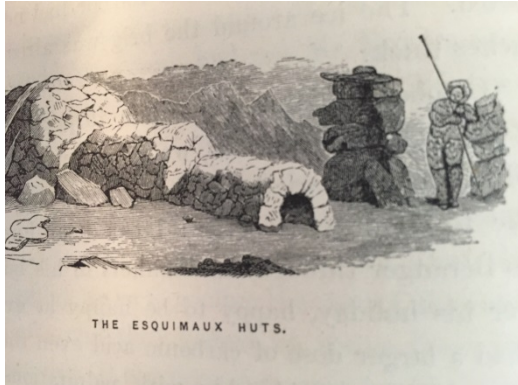
Cool but not as cold as a fish.

(touching again)

Inuugujoq. He is human. Not a spirit, not a mountain dwarf, not a sea monster, not a tupilak or any other mythical creature. He is a human.

*They are qallunaat, white men.
I have seen them before.
These are not spirits.*

PROJECTION



KANE

Preparations were made for my indoor reception.

I crawled in on hands and knees,
Through an extraordinary torsaq thirty paces long.

As I emerged on the inside
There were guests before me.

KANE

They welcomed me.

CHORUS

Tikilluarit!
(Welcome!)

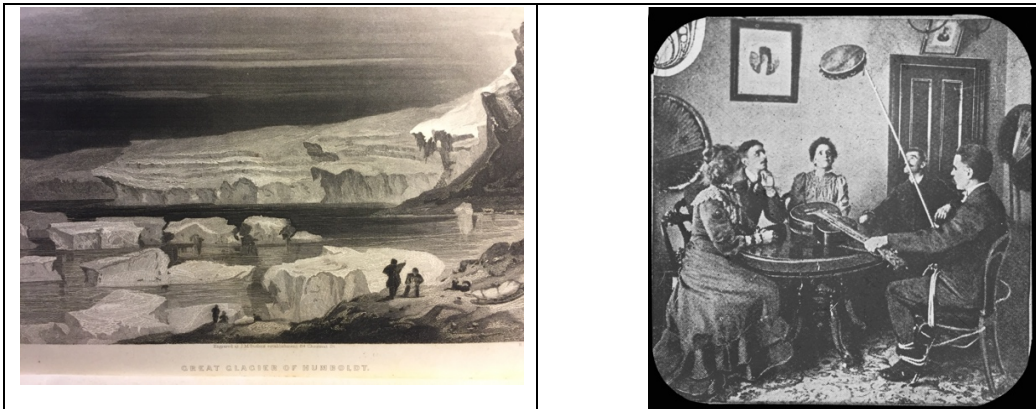
Nuanneq naapillutit
(Pleased to meet you.)

Outside it was minus forty
But the temperature inside was over ninety degrees.

A flipper quarter of walrus was cut into steaks
And put on the fire

Bursting out into profuse perspiration
I stripped like the rest

8: Natural Laws



ELISHA

I am convinced that the expansion of the ice
After the contraction at low temperatures

MAGGIE

The table moved on the floor with no person touching it

ELISHA

And the infiltrative or endosmometric changes thus induced

MAGGIE

Moved to the distance of a foot or more and back
In various directions

ELISHA

The differing temperatures of sea-water and ice,

MAGGIE

While the table stood in that position, by placing our hands upon it
would feel a quick, tremulous motion,

ELISHA

And their chemical relations

MAGGIE

like the action of a galvanic battery.

ELISHA

The mechanical action of pressure, collapse,

MAGGIE

This feeling of electricity seems to pervade nearly everything.

ELISHA

Fracture and disruption
The effects of sun-heated snow-surfaces,

Falls of warm snow, currents, wind, drifts, and
wave-action

All these leave the great mass of Polar ice
surfaces so broken, disintegrated, and reduced,
when the extreme cold abates,

ELISHA

And so changed in structure and molecular character,

MAGGIE

Being colder than the hand of a person in a normal state,

ELISHA

That the few weeks of summer thaw have but a
small job to perform in completing their
destruction.

MAGGIE

As cold as ice.
And the next as warm as a common hand of flesh.

CHORUS

Like a battery, electricity,
Flashes on the wall
And the table moved, a magnetic sleep.
Cold as ice.

MAGGIE

We often see, in a dark room, bright electric
flashes on the wall and other places.

We have frequently had a hand laid on our arms,
shoulders or head, when no person would or
could do it,

having all their hands held by each other.
Leaving a feeling of electricity where they
touched us. The hand feels much like one who is
in a magnetic sleep,

MAGGIE

And moist like a cold perspiration upon it.
One instant it will feel as cold as ice.

CHORUS

molecular, mechanical
Like a battery, endosmometric, low temperatures
Disintegrate, broken ice.

9. Christmas

PROJECTION:



KANE

December 25, Christmas, Monday.

KANE

We sat down to our Christmas dinner.
We forgot our discomforts and counted our blessings,
And when we thought of the long road ahead,
We thought of it hopefully.

MEN

Christmas dinner
We counted our blessings
Christmas, Christmas.

KANE

I pledged myself to give them their next Christmas at home and with their families.

CHORUS

We passed around merrily
Our roast turkeys and roast-beef,
Onions, potatoes and cucumbers,
Watermelons ...

KANE (spoken) <i>And God knows what other cravings of the scurvy-sickened palate, With the entire exclusion of the fact That each one of these:</i>	CHORUS Turkeys and roast-beef, Onions, potatoes and cucumbers, Watermelons ...
--	--

KANE

Roast turkeys and roast beef,
Onions, potatoes and cucumbers,
Watermelons
Was variously represented
By pork and beans.

10. Sir John: Died in Her Majesty's Service

PROJECTION

NOTICE respecting the OFFICERS and CREWS of Her Majesty's Ships "EREBUS" and "TERROR."

Admiralty, 19th January, 1854.

NOTICE is hereby given, that if intelligence be not received, before the 31st March next, of the Officers and Crews of Her Majesty's ships "Erebus" and "Terror" being alive, the Names of the Officers will be removed from the Navy List, and they and the crews of those Ships will be considered as having died in Her Majesty's Service. The pay and wages of the Officers and Crews of those Ships will cease on the 31st day of March next; and all persons legally entitled, and qualifying themselves to claim the pay and wages then due, will be paid the same on application to the Accountant-General of Her Majesty's Navy.

Security will be required in certain cases, for which special provision will be made.

By command of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty.

W. A. B. Hamilton, Secretary.

CHORUS

In Christ there is no East or West
In Him no South or North

But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth.

REPORTER (from the chorus)

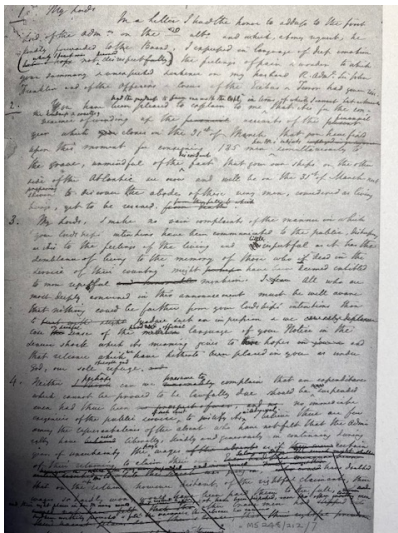
(spoken)

London Gazette, January 19, 1854

NOTICE is hereby given, that if intelligence be not received, before the 31st March next, of the Officers and Crews of Her Majesty's ships commanded by Sir John Franklin,

will be considered as having died in Her Majesty's Service. Etcetera.

PROJECTION:



LADY JANE

My Lords,
Is this the manner in which you communicate your intentions to the public?

SIARNAQ

(spoken)
In other words, the British Royal Navy believes that Sir John Franklin and his crew are dead. We know they are. We've been finding their graves for years. They needed our help but were they too proud or too arrogant to ask for it?

LADY JANE

If so, then it is as distressing to the feelings of the living, as it is disrespectful to the memory of those who, if they have "died in Her Majesty's service" might have been deemed entitled to more regretful mention.

CHORUS

In Christ there is no East or West
In Him no South or North, etc.

LADY JANE

There are grounds for hope that in the Arctic,
the farther north one goes the more temperate the climate.

KANE

I picture your husband and his men
On an open spot of some tidal eddy,
And under the teachings of the Inuit
Have set bravely to work.

I think of them ever with hope.
I sicken not to have been able to reach them.

CHORUS

We cry for our men, to whom we gave
A hearty farewell from the docks as we waved them goodbye
As they sailed off to discover The Northwest passage.

CHORUS

We cry for our men to whom
we gave a hearty farewell from
the docks

as we waved them goodbye as
they sailed off to discover The
Northwest passage.

LADY JANE

My Lords, is this the manner in
which you communicate your
intentions to the public?

If so, then it is as distressing to
the feelings of the living,

KANE

I picture your husband and his
men

On an open spot of some tidal
eddy

We cry for our men, those men
who are brave and gone now
for years

as it is disrespectful to the
memory of those who, if they
have "died in Her Majesty's
service"

And under the teachings of the
Inuit have set bravely to work.
I think of them ever with hope.

God please let them be saved
Bring them home to their wives

might have been deemed
entitled to more regretful
mention.

CHORUS

children and lovers.
At least send us a message

KANE

I sicken not to have been able to reach them.

CHORUS

To tell us they're safe, and they're sound, and that they've
Set course for home, and not laying in graves.

God please tell us and the thousands of others
Those men have not vanished.

Please God just do this, just once, please bring them home
We won't ask you for anything ever again.

Pray God just do this, send them home, send them home
And we'll praise you now and forever, please God, Amen.

11. The Escape

PROJECTION



KANE

The summer was wearing on
And still the ice did not break up as it should.
I have now on hand twenty-four hundred pounds of chopped wood.
Two thousand pounds will barely carry us to the end of January,

And the two severest months of the Arctic year,
February and March,
Will still lie ahead of us.

I have reduced our allowance of wood to six pounds a meal.
It allows us coffee twice a day,
and soup once.

Our fare besides this is cold pork boiled in quantity and eaten as required.
I regard the abandonment of the brig as inevitable.
We have by actual inspection but thirty six days provisions.
We will attempt to escape by crossing the southern ice on sledges.

MEN

"We, the undersigned,
Being convinced of the impossibility of liberating the brig,
And equally convinced of the impossibility of remaining in the ice a third winter,
Do fervently concur with the commander
In his attempt to reach the South by means of sledges."

PROJECTION



MEN

"We the undersigned being convinced of the impossibility of liberating the brig" etc.

KANE

Up to the 23rd of May, the progress had been a little more than a mile a day.

We slept by day when the sun was warmest,
And travelled when we could avoid its greatest glare.

MEN

Things grew worse and worse.
We had difficulty breathing,
Our feet swelled and we had to cut open our boots.

On the first of August we sighted the Devil's Thumb
And were again among the familiar localities.

Two days after this, a mist had settled down upon the islands,
And when it lifted we heard a familiar sound over the water.

(solo)

Listen men!

MEN

What is it?
(beat)
It's the sound of Danish!

KANE

Then we saw the single mast of a small schooner.

CHORUS

“Dr. Kane? Is that you?”

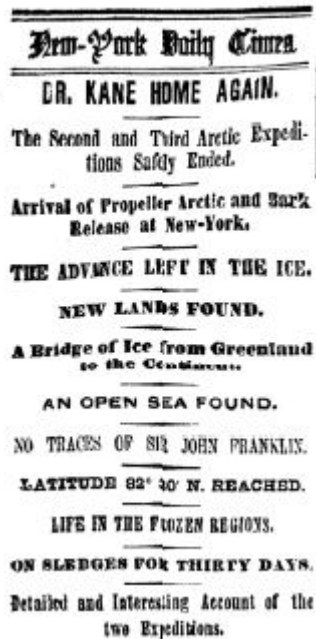
KANE

Yes! Yes!

12. New York

PROJECTION

October 12, 1855



CHORUS

October 12th, 1855

Doctor Kane is home again!
On Sledges for Thirty Days!
Arctic Expeditions Safely Ended!

CHORUS

A Bridge of Ice from Greenland to the Continent!
Latitude 82 degrees 20 minutes!
An Open Sea Found! New Lands Found!

CHORUS

Doctor Kane is home again!
On sleds for thirty days!
Arctic Expedition safely ended!

But no traces of Sir John Franklin.

CHORUS

(repeating until Siarnaq finished.)
Doctor Kane is home again!
New Lands Found!
On sleds for thirty days!
Latitude 82 degrees 20 minutes!
A Bridge of Ice from Greenland to the Continent!

SIARNAQ

(spoken)
A highly intelligent audience assembled at the new Music Hall last evening to hear my friend, Dr. Kane. They listened with profound attention and delight to one of the most interesting lectures they have heard for a long time.

He is a man full of energy, intelligence, and enthusiasm. Dr. Kane will deliver his next lecture on Thursday evening. In this lecture he will read from his new book, Arctic Explorations. I am in that book.

13. Spirit World

(Maggie is standing in front of a projection of Kane's body lying in state.)



CHORUS

He died still a young man, shocking the nation
His body was put on a train made out as a hearse.
Draped with flowers, it was met at each station
By grieving crowds singing this verse:

Dr. Kane, Dr. Kane, our hearts filled with sorrow
Sing as we now lay you down in peace
Your courage and grit make you an American hero
Dr. Kane, Dr. Kane of the cold Arctic Seas.

No, you did not find the passage
And no, you did not find Sir John

But you did find the strength to keep carrying on

Dr. Kane, Dr. Kane on behalf of the nation
We salute you with ships that sail at half mast
We shout and we give you a standing ovation
For all your brave travels, sorry this one's your last.

MAGGIE

(spoken)

My beloved Elisha has been dead for many years.

(sung)

In my final years public interest in my powers declined, and I lived in poverty and obscurity.
My last public appearance was on last Christmas Day, in the Carnegie Music Hall.

(She walks over to the front of the chorus, and stretches her arms out seeking a chorus member's hand on each side of her. Several seconds of silence elapse before her hand is grasped. At the moment the hands touch, we hear the 'spirit-circle music')

MAGGIE

(spoken)

Elisha, is that you?

Lady Jane Franklin comes forward.

LADY JANE

It is I, Lady Jane.
I haven't seen Elisha in quite some time.
But if you should see him, please tell him this:

<p>LADY JANE The Arctic is no longer a <i>terra incognita</i>. Arctic expeditions For the sake of the missing Have long ceased to be familiar. The passage that took my husband's life One hundred and fifty years ago Is easily navigable today.</p>	<p>CHORUS We cry for our men, to whom we gave A hearty farewell from the docks as we waved Them goodbye, As they sailed off to discover The Northwest Passage.</p>
--	---

LADY JANE

When I was alive
Brave Arctic explorers went in search of the passage
In a part of the world that is freezing and savage.
With sextant and compass,
With medicine and guns,
Arrogant and pompous
These men were the ones
Who used science to get where they're going,

Who used science, not always knowing
What could go wrong.
My husband, Sir John, would never admit it
But his plan was flawed.
Instead of the Inuit
He trusted God
To keep him strong.

(Spirit-circle music.)

MAGGIE

(spoken)
Elisha, is that you?

SIARNAQ comes forward.

SIARNAQ

(spoken)
*While you are alive
Arctic explorers go through the passage
Straight through the ice as they watch it vanish
Three hundred billion tons in a day
Melt into the ocean as the earth's getting hotter
Minke whales drifting farther away
Halibut swimming for colder water
Polar bears hunting, and needing more room,
Flowers that in winter came to full bloom
Will disappear.
These are all signs that can't be misread
Signs that I now comprehend
That my land it is dying and once it is dead
Its spirit is free to take its revenge,
That's what I fear.*

MAGGIE

Oh Elisha, I am glad your lectures were so successful.

(spoken)
*You always said you spoke for humanity and not for money.
And that I was wasting my time and youth and conscience
for a few paltry dollars. But when I think of the crowds who
came nightly to hear your wild stories of the frozen north I feel
we are not so far removed after all. And that there is not so much difference.*

MAGGIE

You and I we both were explorers
We each told stories about mysterious places

KANE

We each told stories to crowds that adored us.

MAGGIE

You talked about Eskimos, polar bears, mountains of ice
Of the strange Arctic summer, when the sun shines at midnight
Of the long, scary winter, when it's pitch dark at noon
Igloos and dog-sleds at forty-five below zero
Starvation and scurvy that turn men into heroes
A world that is frozen from September to June

ELISHA

You and I we both were explorers
We each told stories about mysterious places

MAGGIE

We each told stories to crowds that adored us
I talked about spirits, the dearly departed, who after passing
Speak to me slowly through the sound of their rappings.

ELISHA

You sat at a table holding hands with their loved ones

MAGGIE

Together we entered the world of hereafter
I lightened their grief with a moment of laughter
Hearing good news from dead lovers, daughters and sons.

MAGGIE and ELISHA

We talked of places that nobody's seen, but still they believed us
Because they want to believe us, because they want life to be
More than just living:

ELISHA

They want stories of imminent danger,

MAGGIE

Stories of awe and of wonder
Knowing those who are gone are still near

ELISHA

In some other place, but still here

MAGGIE

They paid a whole dollar to sit in a chair
To feel part of a world stranger than theirs.

(to the audience)

It'll cost you a dollar to open the doors
To a world a whole lot stranger than yours.

POSTLUDE
Sullualuk (The Northwest Passage)



CHORUS

We are the spirit of the Northwest Passage
We are the spirit of all places unknown.
You come when we call because you are human
Because you are vain and because you have courage

(solo 1)

And want to see what's beyond the horizon,

(solo 2)

What's over the mountain and under the ocean,

(solo 3)

What's deep in the earth or above in the heavens,

(solo 4)

How to travel in time or to other dimensions,

(all 4 soloists)

Where you go after death.

(all)

There's more to discover, now come hear our message

We are the spirit of the Northwest passage
We are the spirit of all places unknown.
We are here with you now, and we'll be here forever.

THE END

APPENDIX

Sources:

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Hymn "In Christ there is no East or West", words by John Oxenham, music by McKee, 1908.)

All images may be used as projections.